

Can I put realty signs or advertising signs in the right-of-way?

The simple answer is usually no. However, like most situations, being reasonable and thoughtful might allow it in limited cases.

Road right-of-way gives us a place for the road, utilities, and some other public uses. We don't allow things that conflict with road use or with safety. Examples include signs that distract drivers from official traffic signs, restrict visibility, or injure or get in the way of utility services.

Another way to look at this is the difference between public and private use. Even though I referred to "public use", that doesn't mean that everyone has a right to use the space as they see fit. For example, if my local hamburger stand wants to install advertising signs along the road I live on, these signs serve a private purpose, not a public one, and, therefore, are in conflict.

Now the "maybe" explanation. Let's say I want to sell my house and put a "for sale" sign in my front yard. The part of my yard where the sign is visible to possible buyers happens to be in the right-of-way. It may not be an obvious conflict with a public purpose. On the other hand, it clearly becomes a conflict if I put ten signs up and down the road. There is also an obvious difference between one 18" by 24" sign and a four-foot by eight-foot sheet of plywood. Likewise, there is a difference between one small sign in my front yard and nailing my "for sale" sign on a stop sign post.

It is my responsibility as your County Engineer to deal with obvious conflicts. At the same time, I live here too and try hard to be reasonable.

To learn more about putting up signs, your best bet is to call the local building official and ask about private sign regulations. You may also want to ask willing owners to use their private property. Please, remember that even signs on private property can affect utilities or distract drivers from driving safely.

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Questions about this article, or any of the series, or on other topics related to County Roads, may be directed either to your County Engineer, or to Al King, P.E., County Road Administration Board, Olympia, at Al@CRAB.Wa.Gov.